THE BELOIT POETRY JOURNAL

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LETTER TO WITTER BYNNER UPON AN ANNIVERSARY OF HART CRANE'S DEATH

Old poet, old sensitive,
we have been lost, you and I,
in a wrath of years since
"I saw the marvelous long hands reach up
As if to place an accent in the wind;
I saw the water darken on his face
And knew the sea would not divide for him."

You had been with him in Mexico,
and you wrote me afterwards:
"I saw much of him in Taxco
and am glad for his release.
He had to go."

Do you remember, old poet?
Did he walk the little time-smooth streets
and watch the silversmiths of Taxco
make measured clamor of their intricate art?
Did he see them shape on a battered mandrel
whorls of springing silver,
astonishing projections of those hearts
most captive in the turgid flesh
under a total sun?

Did he observe the marvelous hands,
the quick thick fingers, the intelligent thumb,
sorting beauty,
shaping the malleable ultimate,
rubbing the polished accents
on poems of heavy silver?

Did he know how the silversmiths dealt with
absolutes,
values weighed, images carefully consummated,
and how they kept their eyes on their work,
there against the cool adobe in the hot shade?
Sweet Christ, old poet!
Couldn't he know that?
Didn't he see?

Richard Curry Esler

AGAMEMNON AT THE THRESHOLD

"Woman, I have been gone ten years and now
It seems you are about to talk another ten."
11. 914-916

A crowd was listening with hands to measure
This great fondness. I could not move or speak,
For weight of all her words, her liquid ways
Held me like chains. Relentless earrings tolled
Curfew across her shoulders. When she turned
She pointed praise as I would point a dagger.
A dull persistence in her breathless smile
Transfixed my eyes. Flank after flank her prose
Closed in on me. This was my fate, it cried,
A tongue to cut me down. "Enter," it said,
"Your palace, dear." I knew I was a soldier
Confusing love with hate. Pressed now by brightness
Of phrases in the daylight of her flesh
Blowing its bangles and its windy silk
Around me, I thought of Troy again
And death not life beneath the falling walls.

David Posner

MY GRANDFATHER

Like a stalk of ripened corn he fell, bearded,
An old man of uncertain summers. For who
Could reckon by the family clock the weight
Of time he bore, a child of village birth
In Czarist lands no longer to be touched,
Its wormy letters sought excitedly,
On map or spinning globe. And so they spoke—
He lying low with bag of holy soil
Beside the bearded cheek—of marriages
And births, of who was old with whom and when,
Comparing scores and totalling up the measure
Of his length in time, and none could agree
Except that, silent on his age, he was
An old man.
Time drew him to her lips
One somber morning and he lived. No father's
Pride accosted him, his mother's joy
Was tinged with tears, and Michael the Son of
Michael
They called him, reviving in name the youthful dead
That sired a son he never lived to see.
In poverty he grew along the crooked
Village street and neighbor woods and meadow,
Dancing his dawn in fields among the grazing
Goats below whose bellied bags he laughed
With pirate lips and mouth. At five, the backless,
Squirming bench and scarred, unpainted table,
Chant of prayers, singsong lilt of throated
Youngsters spreading like a golden cloud
About the home-turned-school; Genesis tales
Of mighty beginnings, tales of woe, tales
Of wonder, splendor-scattering marvels, bearing
A child through rainbow arch beneath a screaming
Sun to storied land of sand and salty

Sea, of milk and flowing honey; land
Of Fathers, land of Kings, land of camelled
Caravans, of spear and jawbone billy,
Of marshalled tribes and trumpet blares, and over
All the brooding warmth of the fire-cloud God.

At twelve began his wanderings—his mother
Dead—and like a cloak too small to wear,
Too good to throw away, he passed from hand
To hand in Talmud towns, night guardian
Of sacred halls where many a time he lay
Adrift in sleep amid the groaning wreckage
Of wandering beggars, homeless old men, harmless
Madmen, and pauper students like himself.
Until one day, led by parents not
His own, he stood beside the veiled and virgin
Bride, placed the simple silver ring,
Sipped the sweet red wine, and crushed—a groom
At fifteen—the lucky brandy glass beneath
His hammering heel. Thus my genesis,
And my grandfather, before I ever knew him

As the bearded, stern-eyed man in dull
Black kaftan, dusty derby, and high-button shoes,
Swaying before the book-lined shelf in whispered
Prayer, or leading—wrapped in yellowed, black-
striped
Shawl before the burning candles—holiday
Hymns of praise and glory that rose above
The rocking bodies torn with song and spun
Like a sun in the dark of doom until the last
Note rang in his throat, and the echoes slapped at
wall
And window, beat at skin and bone, and fled
Tingling through the swelling pipes of blood.
As Michael the Scribe he was known to all;
Of zealots, the chief; of gad-flies, a sharp and busy

Stinger. And monarch of the Paschal board,
He ruled in white gown, eased in pillows, with golden
Goblet, festive plate of roasted egg,
Herbs, kneaded heap of mortared apple,
Nuts and wine, shank bone, and triple tier
Of mottled matzo—chanting tales of miracle
Might, of swarming frogs and clouds of locusts,
Boiling plagues and sword-drawn angel sweeping
Like gusts of desert wind across the bloodless
Thresholds of sleep-enfolded Egypt. And first
Among clowns on Purim eve, he strutted in carnival
Comedy across the synagogue tables, kettle
Rattling at his waist, head turbaned in towels,
And songs splashing the laughing, hand-clapped air.
Until Time ran grey-stained fingers through
His bristling beard and laid a pinching hand
Upon his heart. And slowly he walked, with pride
As bright as fire in his unbowed back and deep
Brown eyes, in which, when seated at the family
Table, stars of laughter twinkled as he
Conjured with a wizard's craft a favorite
Scene or raised, as in a magic mirror,
A living image through his mimic art.
Thus he lived, jealous of his rights as man
And calling no one master but his God,
Till caught of a cold, he slept and would not wake.

I shall not see him more, this life or next,
I do believe. Our paths had parted long
Before: I to till a stony, foreign
Soil; he to tend his plot of ancient green,
Transplanting in alien earth the oak of his elders.
So on this dying day, I mourn, not him,
Unpinning to the dust his shirt of flesh,
But the fallen seed that lies unrooted, sapless
And alone, in the shadow of that mighty tree.

Samuel A. Weiss

LIED IM SCHUTT

Und als ich über die Brücke kam,
Schutt, nichts als Schutt,
Als ich über die tote Brücke kam,

Da stand mein Vater und drohte mir,
Als wollt er sagen: Das dank ich dir!
Und suchte und suchte, was er nicht fand,
Und hob gegen mich die alte Hand,
Der ich im Wege stand.

Und als ich über die Strasse kam,
Schutt, nichts als Schutt,
Als ich über die tote Strasse kam,
Da stand meine Mutter und sah mich an
Und huschte und wischte hin und her,
Als wenn's in den alten Stuben wär,
Und weinte sehr.

Und als ich über den Torweg kam,
Schutt, nichts als Schutt,
Als ich über den toten Torweg kam,
Da stand mein Bruder und lachte mich aus
Und war von den Flammen ganz klein und kraus
Und sang von unsrer Kindheit ein Lied,
Von der Zeiten Glück und Unterschied
Ein trauriges Lied.

Und als ich über den Garten kam,
Schutt, nichts als Schutt,
Als ich über den toten Garten kam,
Da standen meine Schwestern drei
Und fragten, ob ich es wirklich sei
Oder nur die Vergangenheit,
Und trugen alle ein schwarzes Kleid
Wegen der toten Vergangenheit.

SOLDIER'S RETURN

And as I crossed the well-known bridge,
Rubble, only rubble,
As I crossed the dead bridge,

There stood my father, his menacing face a livid hue,
He seemed to say, "I owe this to you!"
He sought and sought what was not there,
He shook his fists at me in despair
While I stood there.

And as I came to the well-known street,
Rubble, only rubble,
As I came to the dead street:
There stood my mother and looked at me,
She looked—but did she really see?—
She hustled and bustled and polished and swept
As in her old rooms, so spotlessly kept,
And wept.

And as I entered the entrance hall,
Rubble, only rubble,
As I entered the dead hall:
There stood my brother with a taunting smile,
He was tiny and crisped by the fire,
And whispered and pispered a children's rhyme
About happiness and golden times,
A heartbreaking rhyme.

And as I went to our garden then,
Rubble, only rubble,
As I went to our dead garden then:
There stood my sisters, my sisters three
And asked if it were really me
Or only the past.
They were in mourning, and stared aghast
At me? At the past?

Und als ich über den Schulhof kam,
Schutt, nichts als Schutt,
Als ich über den toten Schulhof kam,
Da stand mein alter Lehrer so grau
Und wusste das Gute und Böse genau
Und wies mit den Finger nach hier und dort
In der Menschheit Irrsinn und Brand und Mord
Und fand kein Wort.

Und als ich über den Kirchplatz kam,
Schutt, nichts als Schutt,
Als ich über den toten Kirchplatz kam,
Da stand am zerschmetterten Turme gebückt
Meine Liebste und hatte ein Kränzlein gepflückt
Aus verkohltem Gebälk und zerborstenem Stein
Und lächelte selig und lud mich ein,
Ihre Bräutigam zu sein.

Und als ich über das Ufer kam,
Schutt, nichts als Schutt,
Als ich über das tote Ufer kam,
Da sah ich mich selber im Wasser stehn
Und sah mich selber von dannen gehn,
So leicht, so frei, so ohne Beschwer,
Und glaubte es nicht und ging hinterher,
Als ob es im Traume wär.

Und als ich über die Ferne kam,
Schutt, nichts als Schutt,
Als ich über die tote Ferne kam,
Da sah ich die tote Stadt von fern
Und sah sie aufleuchten wie einen Stern
Und sah ihre Trübsal und Not vergehn
Und sah die Erschlagene auferstehn
Schöner, als je ich gesehn.

Welchen Ruhm und Preis

And as I came to the schoolyard then,
Rubble, only rubble,
As I to the dead schoolyard came:
Among the ruins my teacher stood
Who knew exactly evil from good:
His hand pointed to the frenzied world,
To mankind's madness, and fury unfurled,
He found no word.

And as I went to the churchyard then,
Rubble, only rubble,
As I to the dead churchyard went:
There stood my sweetheart at the gate
And held a wreath which she had made
From crumbled stone and blackened tree
And smiled so sweetly and beckoned to me
Her lover to be.

And as I came to the water's edge,
Rubble, only rubble,
As I came to the water's edge:
I saw my image in th swift-running flood
And saw myself go hither—away—
So light, so free—oh, free of care!—
And could not believe it, and followed there
As if in a dream.

And as I came to the distant land,
Rubble, only rubble,
As I came to the far dead land:
I saw our city from afar,
And saw her glowing like a star,
I saw her woe and her grief were gone,
I saw her ascending, and rising she shone
Fairer than ever.

What glory, what price

Forderst du, unerforschliches Walten?
Wie weit
Sind wir gekommen,
Was hast Du uns genommen,
Ungeheuerlichkeit!
Bist Du noch das ewige Licht?
So mach uns wieder jung!
O schmales grünes Reis,
Das unsere Hände halten,
Welke nicht,
Hoffnung!

Hans Leip

ALS SIE DEN DICHTER BEGRABEN HABEN

Als sie den Dichter begraben haben
War Einer da, der für ein Wochenblatt
Einige Aufnahmen machte. Man sah sie später.
Den steilen Sarg, wie um ein mächtiges Haupt
Gezimmert, und den aufgeworfenen Wall,
Die Schaufel Erde in der Hand des Freundes,
Verwackelt, weil die Hand gezittert hatte.
Es war, alles in Allem, eine klägliche Feier.
Abwesend war das Oberhaupt der Stadt
Abwesend waren die Herren der Akademie.
Die Blumen waren aus Stroh und die Kränze stachlig.

Dost Thou want, Unfathomable Being?
How far
Have we come?
What hast Thou NOT taken from us
Inscrutable Power?
Art Thou still The Eternal Light?
Oh, renew us!

O tender green twig
Which our hands are still grasping:
Don't wilt,
Hope!

Hans Leip
translated by Gertrude C. Schwebell

BURIAL OF A POET

When they buried the poet,
a man was there who took some pictures
for a weekly. We saw them later on.
The high coffin as if framed around a mighty head,
the cast-up wall,
the shovel with earth in the hand of a friend
—blurred—since the hand had trembled.
It was a piteous ceremony, all in all.
Absent was the burgomaster.
Absent were the gentlemen of the Academy.
The flowers were of straw, and the wreaths were
prickly.

Wer stürbe gerne in der Rosenzeit?
Der Pfarrer sprach sehr lang. Die Kinder übten
Verstohlen still, auf einem Bein zu stehen.
Einige waren gekommen, die niemand erblickte.
Sieben Dryaden, zwei Nymphen, ein
Feuersalamander.
Nicht, dass der Dichter sie besungen hätte
Doch sie schienen zu glauben, sie gehörten dazu.
Die Gäste hatten Angst sich zu erkälten
Ein Toter zieht den Anderen ins Grab . . .
Sie schlossen ihre Mäntel, starrten gedankenlos
Die Wolke an, die über ihre Köpfe
Dahinfuhr schwarz und herrlich—
Die schöne Wolke, dachte der Photograph
Und machte eine Aufnahme privat.
Ein fünfzigstel Sekunde, Blende zehn.
Doch auf der Platte war dann nichts zu sehen.

Marie Luise Kaschnitz

DIE EBENE

Ich befand mich allein mit einem Stuhl auf einer Ebene,
Die sich in einen leeren Horizont verlor.
Die Ebene war fehlerlos asphaltiert.
Nichts, aber auch gar nichts ausser mir und dem Stuhl befand sich auf ihr.
Der Himmel war immerwährend blau.

Who likes to die in the time of roses?
The minister spoke overlong. The children practiced,
furtively quiet, to balance on one leg.
Some had come and nobody laid eyes on them:
Seven dryads, two nymphs, a salamander.
Not that the poet sang of them
but they seemed to believe they belonged.
The mourners were afraid they might catch cold
'A dead man will draw another man into the grave'
They buttoned their coats, unthinkingly gazing
at the cloud which sailed above their heads,
dark and magnificent—
Such a beautiful cloud, thought the photographer
and privately he took a picture—
One fiftieth second, diaphragm ten.
But, it turned out, the cloud eluded him.

Marie Luise Kaschnitz
translated by Gertrude C. Schwebell

THE PLAIN

I was alone with a chair in a plain
Which lost itself in a void horizon.
The plain was faultlessly asphalted.
Nothing, absolutely nothing, but the chair and I were in this plain.
The sky was forever blue,

Keine Sonne belebte ihn.
Ein unerklärliches, unvernünftiges Licht erhellte die endlose Ebene
Wie künstlich aus einer anderen Sphäre projiziert,
Erschien mir dieser ewige Tag.
Ich hatte nie Schlaf, nie Hunger, nie Durst, nie heiss, nie kalt.
Da sich nichts auf dieser Ebene ereignete und veränderte,
War die Zeit nur ein abwegiges Gespenst.
Die Zeit lebte noch ein wenig in mir,
Und dies hauptsächlich wegen des Stuhles.
Durch meine Beschäftigung mit ihm verlor ich den Sinn für Vergangenes nicht ganz.
Ab und zu spannte ich mich, als sei ich ein Pferd, vor den Stuhl
und trabte mit ihm bald im Kreis, bald gerade aus.
Dass es gelang, nehme ich an,
Ob es gelang, weiss ich nicht,
Da sich ja im Raume nichts befand,
An dem ich meine Bewegung hätte nachprüfen können.
Sass ich auf dem Stuhl, so grübelte ich traurig, aber nicht verzweifelt,
Warum das Innere der Welt ein solch schwarzes Licht ausstrahlte.

Hans Arp

No sun gave life to it.
An inscrutable, insensible light illuminated
the infinite plain.
To me this eternal day seemed to be projected
artificially—from a different sphere.
Never had I sleep nor hunger nor thirst,
never hot nor cold.
Time was only an abstruse ghost since nothing
happened or changed in this plain.
In me Time still lived a little
And this was mainly on account of the chair.
Owing to my occupation with it I did not lose
completely
my sense for the past.
Now and then I would hitch myself, as if I were
a horse,
to the chair and would trot around with it, sometimes
in circles,
and sometimes straight ahead.
I assume that I succeeded,
Whether I succeeded I do not know
Since there was nothing in space
By which I could have checked my movements.

As I sat on the chair I pondered sadly,
but not desperately,
Why the core of the world exuded such black
light.

Hans Arp
translated by Gertrude C. Schwebell

FIRENZE

A Firenze in Via Tornabuoni
Una fuciacca di cielo è tesa
Sui fili
Del telefono 8-85
L'altro emisfero si rinfresca
Da Doney e Nipoti
Con una penna di paradiso
Al cappello
E fra le trine un profumo
Di Floride e Splendid Hotels

Un vecchio affogato nella primavera
Trascina un paniere d'iride sul marciapiede
Lungo le vetrine infuocate
Di cravatte di fogli da mille e di liquori
"Due soldi il mazzo le violette
I narcisi e gli anemoni"

La collina di San Miniato
Sciacqua nell'Arno i suoi ori di Bisanzio
I suoi cipressi
E le ville
Il Ponte vecchio incrostato di gemme
I campanili
I tea rooms
Coll'acqua verde
Partono fra due argini felici di sole

Non si puo vivere in questa pace
D'azzurri viali
Dove non c'è che un tranvai
Ogni venti minuti
Candele steariche e buste fiorite
Nelle vetrine
E visi di spose e di bimbi
Soffocati di calda noia

FLORENCE

In Florence at Via Tornabuoni
A sash of sky is taut
On wires
Of the telephone 8-85
The other hemisphere is cooling
At Doney and Nipoti
With a feather of paradise bird
On the hat
Amid the laces a perfume
Of Florida and Splendide Hotels

An old man drowned in spring
Drags a basket of iris on the sidewalk
Along the burning glass fronts of windows
Of ties of 1000 lire banknotes and liqueurs
"Two cents a bunch the violets
The narcissus and the anemones."

The hill of San Miniato
Rinses in the Arno its Byzantine golds
Its cypresses
And villas
The Ponte Vecchio gem-encrusted
The church-steeples
The tea-rooms
With green water
Take leave between two bright edges of sun

One cannot live in this peace
Of blue avenues
Where a trolley car passes
Every twenty minutes
Wax candles and flowered envelopes
In the windows
And faces of brides and children
Smothered by the warm boredom

Alle finestre
Spalancate sul nulla di mezzogiorno

Un affisso delle Folies Bergère
O dello Splendor
E piu emozionante
Di tutta la storia
Rassegata in fronte alle torri
E alle cupole senza dio ne' colombe
(piccioni del Duomo
Li mangia il Priore
Della Misericordia)

La notte si scrive col fuoco
Sui muri del Centro
A nuova vita restituito
Nomi e orari
Attimi vibrati nell'eternità
Come questa sigaretta che accendo
In un caffè d'Europa
La Rosa
Il 6 marzo 1915

Su tutte le case degli stranieri
C'è l'appigionasi
Le Family pensions
Non hanno piu amori
Dietro le bianche cortine
Non piu yes da oui ja
Non c'è piu un fiaccheraio al passo per le Cascine
Non piu serenate di parrucchieri
Il lume di luna è tutto alla guerra

Non ci siam piu che noi a cantare
Di disperazione
Per i vicoli morti
Oltr'Arno
A San Frediano

At the windows
Opened wide on the void of noon

A sign of the Folies Bergere
Or of the Splendor
Is more exciting
Than all the history
Clotted below the towers
And cupolas without god or doves
(The doves of the Duomo
Are eaten by the Prior
Of the Misericordia)

Night is written with fire
On the walls of the Centro
"Restored to new life"
Names and time-tables
Instants hurled in eternity
Like this cigarette I light
In a Café of Europe
La Rosa
The 6th of March 1915

On all the houses of strangers
There is a vacancy sign
The Family Pensions
Have no more loves
Behind the white curtains
No more "yes" "oui" or "ja"
Not a single hackdriver moves at a pace at the
Cascine
No more serenades from the barbers
The light of the moon has all gone to war.

Only we are here to sing
Of desperation
Through the dead alleys
Beyond the Arno
At San Frediano

Al Canto alla Briga
Si cammina sulle immondezze
Sui gatti assassinati
E i capelli
Accanto alle porte inchiodate dei bordelli
Appena un lampione e qualche stella appesa ai rami
in amore
Ci fan ricordare che la vita
Ricomincia tutte le mattine

Voglio scurdarme 'o cielo
Tutte'e canzone e 'o mare

Nelle botteghe fuori la legge
La teppa ride e bestemmia
In chiave d'organino e di coltello
Confitta nel fumo
E nell'afrore del vino bianco e nero
La prostituzione
Imbelletta le cantonate
Sul fondo di vecchie réclames
Ogni donna è un fiore
Caduto da questi giardini sepolti di tenebra
Inzuppato di menta glaciale
E impolverato di minio
Come l'aurora.

A Firenze per tutte le vie
A tutte le ore
S'incrociano le avventure del mondo
Il "Messaggiero" di Roma arrivato ora
Ed il vento
Che batte l'occhio giallo dell'orologio della stazione
Entrano dalle persiane aperte
E gonfiano tutti gli hangars multicolori
Della poesia.

Ardengo Soffici

At the Canto della Briga
One walks on filth
And dead cats
And the hair
Beside the nail-clamped doors of the brothels
Scarcely a lamplight maybe a star that hangs on
boughs in love
Reminding us that life
Begins each morning

"I want to forget the sky
All the songs and the sea."

In the shops off limits
The mob laughs and blasphemes
In organ-grinder key and of knife
Stuck in smoke
And in the acrid odor of white and black wine
Prostitution
Decorates the corners
Beneath the ancient billboards
Each woman is a flower
Fallen from these gardens buried in darkness
Drenched in mint julep
Dusted with red lead
Like the dawn.

In Florence on all the streets
At all hours
The adventures of the world intercross
The "Messaggiero" of Rome newly arrived
And the wind
That strikes the yellow eye of the railroad clock
They enter from the open window blinds
Swelling all the multicolored hangars
Of poetry.

Ardengo Soffici
translated by D. M. Pettinella

MATTINA

La luce non è che un mazzolino di fiori piu sottili
Un ronzio di mosche d'oro e verdi il cielo
Senza questo pardessus parigino si potrebbe ballare
A tutti i piani c'è la musica come in paradiso
Una signora vestita del tricolor dell'Italia nelle
cromolitografie patriottiche
Evade verso l'oriente
Jamais de ne voudrais être son chien
Piuttosto piangere di tenerezza
Sul miracolo della gente che risuscita ogni giorno
In questo enigma universale che piglia per un
almanacco
E passa
E passa con la tranquillità dei giovenchi
Ah! noi moriremo per aver troppo adorato le cose da
nulla
L'aria d'anilina mi bagna come una camicia tuffata
nel turchinetto
Vedo tutto
Il baccalà che sperimenta il Nirvana fiorito di
pomidori nelle zangole azzurre
L'ombre delle grondaie abbassate sugli occhi glauchi
delle persiane
Le ombre degli uomini che si sprofondano
Nella terra trasparente
E a un tratto capisco questa verità Ogni
nuova civilizzazione esce dal riso dei bambini
Il timpano del sole batte sullo specchio del
parrucchiere
Per farmi sorridere
Ma non si puo che seguire in silenzio la freschezza
delle ore

(I miei capelli sono sinistri!)

Ardengo Soffici

MORNING

Light is a small cluster of the thinnest flowers
A buzzing of flies golden and green in the sky
Without this Parisian cloak one could dance
On every floor where the music is like heaven's
A lady dressed in the tricolor of Italy in patriotic chromolithographs
Evades towards the orient
Jamais je ne voudrais être son chien
Rather weep for affection
On the miracle of the people that are revived each day
In this universal enigma that is taken for an almanac
And passes
And passes with the tranquillity of young bullocks
Ah! We shall die for having worshiped baubles
The aniline air wets me like a shirt dipped in bluing
I see everything
The codfish experimenting Nirvana blooming in tomatoes in blue churns
The shadows of gutters lowered over glaucous eyes from window blinds
The shadows of men that sink
In the transparent earth
And suddenly I understand this truth Each new civilization emerges from the laughter of children
The eardrum of the sun beats on the barber's mirror
That I may smile
But only in silence can one follow the freshness of the hours
(My hair is ominous)

Ardengo Soffici
translated by D. M. Pettinella

TWO POEMS

The Miracle

Don't be too quick to laugh at miracles.
We had an old Ben Davis apple tree
That turned into an orchestra one fall
With woodwind sounds of wind in applewood.
And everybody in the neighborhood
Came by to listen when the wind was right.

It wasn't just the sigh of wind in trees.
That's fancy talk, and this was something more.

One branch of apples bumped against the roof
To make the drums.
One stubby twig scraped on a window-pane;
To save your life
You couldn't tell it from a fife.

The topmost limb would bang the windmill fin
Just like a cymbal,
And two big branches rubbed, making groans
Like saxophones.

The neighbors would come and listen together
Whenever we had windy weather.

The night the big storm hit there must have been
Sixty people standing by the yard
Because they knew the music sounded best
Whenever it was blowing extra hard.

There came a gust; the old tree gave a lurch;
We felt the roots pop underground,
And there it lay across our kitchen porch.

And here's where the whole town
Started to disagree.
The Baptists claimed its last tune was
Nearer, My God, to Thee.
Our cook said it was
Nobody Knows the Trouble I see.
The Sons of Erin swore it was
The Wearin' O' the Green.
A tailor said *Kol Nidre;*
A gardener said *Aida;*
A cowboy said *Buffalo Gals;*
And everyone else said everything else.

But dad and I said *Home Sweet Home,*
And sawed the darned tree up alone.

Carlin Aden

The Cat

There was our old gray tomcat killing little yellow
chicks.
The mother hen was squalling in her terror,
But she flew about the pen and fought.

I cornered him and caught him in the henhouse;
He yowled and clawed my arm.
The scratch
Consumed my indecision like a match.

I held him by the scruff until

I found a sack and forced him in.
He thrashed about and tried to bite me
As I bound the opening with twine.

I took him through the barnyard to the wood.
He growled and spat and then was still
Until we reached the woodlot.

Then he called a low miaow
As if he knew that any hope
Must hang on just the proper tone.

If he had called again, he might have won.

I put him down and got a heavy stick,
And when he moved,
I hit the sack
Where I could see the upcurve of his back.

That should have been enough,
But it was not.
He fought and tore about so madly
I couldn't land a second blow.

The binding-twine came loose, and he leaped out.
He scrambled in a circle.
Had he cried, it might have been less terrible.
But scrambling silent with his mouth held wide,
Through cow dung and dry leaves,
He fell and ran in circles,
Fell and ran.

I fed my waning anger on chicken torn and dead
And hit the cat again.
I crushed his head;
One eye popped out.

I see him now as if I still
Were sixteen, scared and sorry.

I wished to Christ—
This was not blasphemy,
He was the one to speak to, and I did—
I wished for resurrection then and there.

I caved a sand-bank down to cover him,
Vomited and went home.

Glad my parents were away,
For half an hour or more I sat alone,
As I suppose cat killers ought to be,
Thinking on this three-way thing
Of chickens, cat and me.

There was a scratching at the kitchen screen
and, oh good God, the cat!
That eye hung out,
And he, too sick and hurt
To free his crooked mouth of blood and dirt,
Was trying to get in.

With thirty years gone by, I cannot tell
The rest, except to say I killed him well
The second time,
If one can kill a cat
As hard and hot and claw-hooked onto life as that
one was
And say he killed him well.

There was a cat got killed that afternoon,
But I would be the last to say how soon
A mangled cat stops following a boy,
Stops following a man,
Stops following.

And I would be the last to say
A mangled cat stops following.

Carlin Aden

FOUR POEMS

Excrescence

I have seen at a tree's base blooming
a carbuncular lobe
so stuffed with purple fibrin
that flesh split bloodlessly.

Not matter to attract fingertips
it had no smell, no limb, no leaves
and in its furrows failing green
designed a sickness on the health of Spring.

And I have remembered a diagram
that flowered on a page:
"The Right Cerebral Hemisphere"
line drawn in tubes of knowledge.

Why did a drawing seem Medusa's crown
where serpents slept in neat combed curls?
This figure of arrangement
gathered to a fist,
paraphrased to be the proudest
weapon of a slave or scientist.

I have kicked from the spine of my tree
a barbarous vegetable blossom.
Dreading its growth with my heart
I have struck with my heel
and a vigor that seemed only partly mine
in reflex to all mushrooming
designing
menace to design.

Beatrice Frackelton

Nota Bene

(for William Carlos Williams)

I've been backward
with that wheel-barrow
        from the very start.
O—it's red, all right—
        lacquered,
        bright,
and slippery from the rain
        and tart
as any radish
burning at the heart
        or brain.

But when I try to focus it
beside white chickens
        (where 'so much depends')
the composition falls
        apart,
the contemplative framework
        bends;
        because
despite all efforts of the will
I cannot
        get the chickens
        to stand still.

And furthermore
the chickens that I see,
        peculiarly
are turned to swans
        or mice
        when I look twice.

So I'm racing

with my wheel-barrow
(on loan from Dr. Williams)
chasing
chickens
swans
or mice
in an effort to entice
movement
into cluster which still stems
from something
white.

But
I might
as well
not try
(however much depends).
Of all the world's egg-born,
in whites,
in blacks,
in blends,
I've never found
(I never will)
a swan,
a mouse,
a leghorn
that
stood
still.

Beatrice Frackelton

The Red Spangled Ape

Dark density of knotted pelt
Where I, several, pluck embedded burrs.
Does a dog have hair or fur?
Hair names him closer to his human,
Offering god and opportunity
Simplified;
Gifts to his immaculate honesty.

But see where the red spangled ape
Sits his black forest grinning;
Eating his scarlet heart
Where the rocks are trapped like seeds.

He was born before birth got to him,
Gestate in the silver temple;
His umbilical seepage threading
The vascular structure of waiting bones.

O, he belonged;
Threading red,
Seeping slow,
Indestructible,
Shrieking.
He belonged apriori
Like wet to water,
Like gelatinous mucus
Threading the bent bones.

A tree toad loops along the road
Finding the grass is too tall;
And somewhere a gentle serpent
Glides through the woven weeds
Surely to find him.

There are always the animals' eyes;
Alive before living, before loving,

Like bulbs of Trillium lily;
And the churring of probable chipmunks,
Politic scurry
That raises the dog's combed hair,
The black nap over his tail
In a ripple of laughter.

Love like fog can fill these woods
Until the living creatures here
Lose their way in it,
Standing arrested on too few feet
Shy to put another down.

Only the red spangled ape
Secretly feasts on his shelter:
Crimson heart where the rocks are trapped.

He belongs.
Here.
Somewhere.
In confident immortality.

Is it this universal I imagine?
Or these clusters of particulars?
Being at once these things,
I, multiple, kneel
Combing this dog;
Fingering a dark forest.

Beatrice Frackelton

Ten Cent Climate

Why did I almost buy that bird,
Pale mediocrity of caged canary;
Was it his winter bare to wired inches
That composed my larger January?

Boxed birds hang priced at counterfeit:
Cost of deliberate error adding fraud along with
score.
Was there a garden once where gold winged sinners
Ravished a monstrous apple to its rotten core?

I turned a hard back; a dime store is a shop
In which to find large envelopes—not thought;
And not a place to conjugate the count of cages
Or finger any pretense that need not be bought.

Caught in our mutual pang of winter in a chill dime
store
That bird and I were even—until—unfair—
He gathered tall the useless grace he wore,
Higher than any tree I ever saw
—and sang.

Flung down his theme: stump of his heritage;
Diamonds rained reverberant over knell
Of tin and creatures in a ten cent store
Consigning me with music to his cell.

I passed a caged canary in weather dead
As January in a gimcrack store
Quickly enough; it didn't take me long.
Perhaps I fled wondering what prison door
Had ever opened to a song.

Beatrice Frackelton

FANDI WITH HAT

Midway, in Africa, between two towns
a native moves, half naked and all black.
A loincloth, loosely strapped from panther hips,
surrounds him, as the shrieking jungle does:

Indignantly the jungle calls him back.

A derby, also black, resolves his head.
He found it, obviously discarded, near a road,
and wears it now, filthy and old, with reverence
like something vaguely sacred and profound.

The truth is that he wears it like a limb,
hoping that it will grow, become
a part of him. He is not naked anymore,
and is quite sure it has undone
his Africa within.

Steve Kowit

IBIS

Ibis,
Ebony and alabaster:
In the green caverns of papyrus,
He cannot hear the dahabeah's prow
Sunder the Nile,
Nor the winds from Karnak,
Freighted with sand and incense.
But the caverns speak
With little myriad voices:
Scarab, lizard, and dragonfly
Eddying pollen among the lotuses.
What need has the ebony bird
For winds and rivers?

Thomas Burnett Swann

On The Departure of His Telephone, Gas—, Electricity, Wife, Daughter & Groceries

They are leaving me, in Max's, my father-
In-law's car. The telephone, my wife,
They are walking down the stairs. Nine flights
Of stairs. Perhaps ten. The baby cries.
No one is saying Goodbye. A bag
Of cans of Campbell's soup
breaks, and cans
Tumble down the stairs. Bean soup, split pea,
Chicken noodle, chicken gumbo,
clear
Consommé. It is depressing. *God!*
I half expect to get into the car
With them, my wife, Max, the groceries,
The baby, the telephone
Dorothy,
The gas-meter, the toaster, the electric
Hot-plate . . .
it is depressing. I weep;
I put my hand into the waffle . . .
There is no electricity. Bang!
Doors are slamming. Windows. Suitcases.
The wallpaper is slipping off the wall . . .
I weep. I am depressed. I clutch
A group of poems. I sit upon
My Underwood, and eat my poems.
Max giggles. Dorothy (*Reason,* Momma—
Law) comes back for cardboard. Clutching soup,
Bag-shreds, diapers, clothespins,
the hot-plate.

There goes the icebox! *Stop* . . .
the stove, *bang!*
The door slams.
They are walking down the
Stairs. I am eating my syllabics.
Rejection slips. The *Atlantic Monthly.*
Satire. Advertisements.
I am sleepy.
The streetcar clangs. The cars honk.
A man swears
On the street below.
It is silent.
It is evening. It is after evening.
It is morning. It is light, before
The sun.
I yawn, I stretch, I sit upon
My Underwood,
nibbling
the *New Poets* . . .
It is depressing. The ceiling is there.
I look at it. I am hungry. *God!*
Donald Hall, the landlady, —they appear.
He is her son, her eldest son.
She asks for sonnets. Psalms. Iambics,
Anyway.
She wants my Underwood.
The police arrive. They are *for* her.
Donald is for her. *I* am for her.
I am asked to go to work. I go . . .

Robert S. Sward

HERON CHILD

chill shine alone knife-keen
brown-bodied child alone,
tangled pitch of hair,
picks her way among
the oval stones. Sand
sucks on her heel by the lake's
blazing coin. Far along
the span that bends around
the crooks of pools, heron
stands, quiescent on
its one taut knee. Blue
drops rustle in its wing.
In its immobile head
a sliding eye fastens
on the child who knows
a taking in more rare
than humans ever see.

Myrtle Chamberlin

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